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The case for socialism

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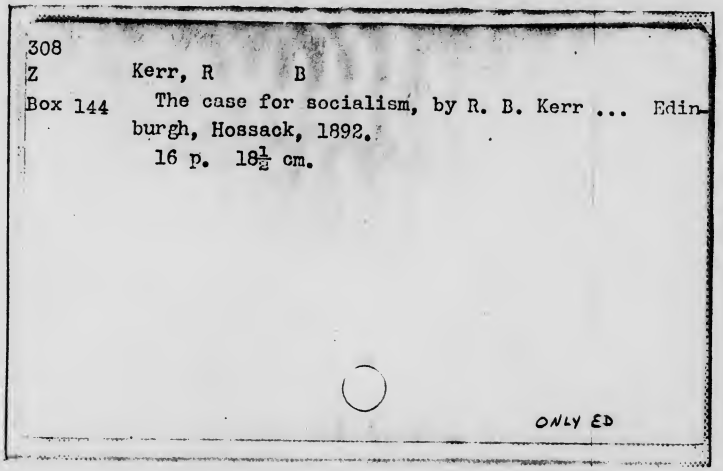

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THE

Case for Socialism.

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1892.

THE CASE FOR SOCIALISM.

DURING the whole of the 19th century a movement, quite unparallelled in history, has been spreading in ever-widening circles throughout the world. Several preceding movements have presented analogous features, but in force, universality, and disregard of creed and colour, it has far transcended them all. It has appeared in every continent and kindled the hearts of men of every race. Its apostles have been ridiculed, but ridicule has only doubled their zeal. The rulers of the earth have tried to crush the movement, only to find that they were impotent before its mighty power. It has had its noble army of martyrs in every land. Russian noblemen have left their lands and honours and risked their lives to become its missionaries among the poor. Women have gone to suffer the horrors of Siberia, rejoicing all the while that they had been born to die for such a cause. Young lovers have thought it better to die for Socialism than to live for love.

If the cause has had its martyrs, it has also had its thinkers. To enumerate the great men of all countries who have declared for Socialism would be too hard a task. We shall name only some of the most eminent in our own country. The most momentous of recent scientific discoveries was that of Evolution by natural selection. It was arrived at simultaneously by two men, Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace. The latter is a Socialist. John Stuart Mill, "the saint of Rationalism," died a Socialist. William Morris would have been the next poet laureate of England, had he not become the poet laureate of Socialism.

Nov. 28, 1923 ACT

Walter Crane, Stopford Brooke, Grant Allan, are honoured names,—they are the names of Socialists.

The progress of the movement has been singularly rapid. In Germany in 1887 the Socialists polled only 774,128 votes. In 1890 they polled 1,427,000, being one-fifth of all the votes cast in the election. Ten years ago the name of Socialism was hardly known in England. Now there are at least eight Socialists on the London County Council, and the present Council was elected to carry out a programme formulated by a Socialist. In the House of Commons, too, the movement has several representatives. But where is it unrepresented? Strong and weak, wise and foolish, young and old, rich and poor, have all joined this great brotherhood. In the words of Morris,

> "Some had name, and fame, and honour, learned they were, and wise, and strong,
> Some were nameless, poor, unlettered, weak in all but grief and wrong."

DEFINITION OF SOCIALISM.

What then are all these men striving to obtain? What, in short, is the aim of Socialism? I define it as follows: Socialism is the doctrine that all the instruments of collective production should be owned by the community, that all persons who wish to work should have access to the instruments of production, and that the total produce should be divided between the various members of Society in whatever way experience may show to be most conducive to the welfare of all.

Two things are requisite to maintain the life of man. 1st, labour; 2nd, materials whereon to labour. A man will do little with his labour if he have no ground to stand on, no tools to work with, and no raw materials on which to work. But that is just the predicament of most people at the present day. Coming naked into the world, they find that the land beneath their feet, the mines under the land, the woods that cover it, the streams that intersect it, are all the property of other men. To work or even live upon the land they must ask the permission of a few monopolists, who can impose almost any terms they please. Against this evil Socialists protest uncompromisingly, asserting that all who are willing to help in the work of society should have the right to live in their own country without asking

any man's consent, labouring in peace, and enjoying a fair and full reward.

THE EVILS OF INDIVIDUALISM.

Socialists allege that the monopoly of the means of subsistence and the entire disorganisation of Industry characteristic of Individualism lead to several most galling and intolerable evils. Moreover they allege that these evils, though pressing hardest upon the poor, are by no means confined to them, and may be felt at any time even by those who seem quite secure. Of these evils the following are most conspicuous:—

1. The unjust apportionment of the produce of labour "almost in an inverse ratio to the labour—the largest portions to those who have never worked at all, the next largest to those whose work is almost nominal, and so in a descending scale, the remuneration dwindling as the work grows harder and more disagreeable, until the most fatiguing and exhausting bodily labour cannot count with certainty on being able to earn even the necessaries of life."*
2. The loss of productive power entailed by poverty, the growth of the many being stunted and their minds warped by underfeeding and unhealthy surroundings, while the finest talents are often lost through lack of opportunity.
3. The loss of productive power entailed by great wealth, which enables many of its holders to live either in idleness or in unproductive labour, which is at least useless, if not injurious, to the community.
4. The loss of productive power due to the absence of any attempt to organise industry for the common good, great numbers of people being constantly out of work, while many others live by occupations which do not add in any way to the total product of industry.
5. The injuries inflicted on society by competition, which not only leads to adulteration, overreaching and gambling in every form, but causes great numbers of people to be employed in printing and circulating advertisements, and otherwise wasting their time in pursuits which add nothing to the total wealth of society.
6. The crushing burden of toil imposed on those who really work, in order to balance the idleness of those who either cannot get work to do, or have no need to do it.
7. The incessant anxiety and life-long worry due to the disorganisation of society, the poor being in constant dread that some industrial crisis will throw them out of work, the moderately well endowed being afraid that their sickness or death may cast their wives and children into poverty, and the rich having no guarantee against the loss of their property through the roguery or stupidity of others.
8. The social misery caused by the fierce war of competition, which deprives many people of both sexes of all domestic comforts, condemning them to celibacy and poverty during that period of life when the powers of enjoyment are greatest, and compelling many women to sell what they would like to give.
9. The sordid and selfish spirit engendered by competition, which compels men to live in an incessant war against each other instead of combining to help each other, and thus fosters all the basest, and extinguishes all the noblest elements in human nature.
10. The loss of all freedom and individuality among men who can only live by the consent of others, and are in constant fear of losing the means of subsistence.
11. The pain endured by those who, while themselves lifted above the fear of want, are surrounded on all sides by an ocean of physical squalor and an atmosphere of moral baseness.

Let us discuss some of these evils more fully.

* Quoted from John Stuart Mill.

THE CONTRAST OF WEALTH AND POVERTY.

Lord Beaconsfield said that there were two nations in England, the rich and the poor. The statement has been completely verified by all our best statisticians. From a comparison of the writings of these gentlemen the Fabian Society has shown, in its tract entitled "Facts for Socialists," that the class which lives by manual labour, and produces every article of material utility by which other men live, earns

little more than a third of the whole product of industry. Yet, in the words of William Morris,

"These are they who build thy houses, weave thy raiment, win thy wheat,
Smooth the rugged, fill the barren, turn the bitter into sweet."

The total annual product of industry in this country amounts to about £1,350,000,000, according to the tract above mentioned. Of which the manual labourers receive £500,000,000. And the non-industrial classes receive £850,000,000. Yet the industrial classes are at least twice as numerous as the non-industrial.

It is estimated that the annual income of the masses is such that, if the whole of it were earned by males, the average income per adult male would be £77. Of course we know that it is not earned by adult males, and that the women and children have often to work hard to raise even that meagre sum. What is it possible to say or think of the condition of a nominally large family brought up on £77 a year? How can they receive sufficient food to make them good citizens, or even efficient beasts of burden? What can they have to do with health or happiness? What has civilisation done for them?

Turn now to the other end of the social scale, where thousands of people are living in enervating luxury, who never did and never mean to do a single thing to justify their presence in the world. If they derived pleasure from their enormous wealth, it might be some compensation for the misery of most of the human race. But can that be alleged for a moment? Do they really enjoy their vain and aimless lives, directed by no worthy purpose, and dedicated to no heroic effort for the common good? Would any wise man willingly choose for his children a career of useless idleness as the greatest of earthly blessings? And even if listlessness and luxury were the best things in the world, surely they could be supplied in abundance for less than £300,000 or £400,000 a-year. No man requires sums like these to enjoy life. If three-fourths of such incomes were thrown into the sea, no human creature would be a whit less happy.

We have spoken as if there were a sharp line of division between rich and poor. But in truth it is not so. Living side by side with the rich are many persons, nominally among the comfortable classes, who suffer more from the fight with poverty than most occupants of the slums. Who

would envy the life of a curate, compelled to choose between shabby-genteel celibacy and the absolute destitution entailed by marriage? Look at every learned profession and ask which is most to be pitied, the labouring or the learned proletariat. And what of those who succeed? What years of weary toil they must undergo, destitute of domestic comforts and all refining influences, until success finds them broken in health and soured in temper. And what becomes of the women of our middle and upper classes! A few are happily married to men of their own age, but very many more have no such prospect. They have to choose between three courses; either to marry men much older than themselves, whom they do not love; or to work for a pittance just sufficient to keep body and soul together; or to live in idleness and perpetual oscillation between unhealthy excitement and listless apathy. But even this choice is denied to many. Celibacy is coming more and more to be the general lot; for although it is true that more men than women are born, yet so many men are compelled to emigrate and leave their sisters behind, and so many more are prevented by competition from supporting homes, that the chances of securing a suitable partner are sinking to zero.

Yet we are constantly hearing of the greatness and wealth of our country. And it is true. Britain is by far the richest country in the Old World. Her wealth increases from year to year by leaps and bounds. But what does it matter to the British people? To them it is true now as in the past that

"To-day and to-morrow bring fear and sorrow,
The never-ending toil between."

DIFFICULTY OF GETTING WORK.

But, after all, the greatest of human trials is not doing work, but seeking work. To every man the first question is how to find work in order to "make a living." One might imagine that inasmuch as all human wants are supplied by work, and many human wants are still unsupplied, society would be only too glad to find a man who would work, and to give him as much as he cared to do. But the facts are otherwise. At all times the streets of our great cities swarm with men and women who cannot find any place for them in the industrial system. All

around are hungry, and illclad, and homeless people, capable of employing and absorbing an unlimited amount of human labour. They themselves would gladly work for money to keep away the wolf from the door. But it cannot be. They remain idle, and others who might have had their custom remain idle too for want of it. They may not work for others and others may not work for them. Over-population! you cry. Alas! dear friends, look at Australia and the United States. These countries are not overpopulated, but they have the same difficulties to contend with. The American farmer would gladly produce far more, but he cannot get it sold. How happy many a poor child in the old country would be to have a slice of bread! How gladly the farmer in the new country would raise the wheat to bake the bread! But individualism steps in to blight the hopes of both. Surely the curse of Cain was a trifle compared with the curse of gold.

We have spoken of those who cannot find any work to do. But how many are engaged in work which in no way increases the sum of industrial produce. What is the use of our enormous army of middlemen, who do not produce, but merely help to distribute what others produce? A few great stores could easily do the work of thousands of shopkeepers, leaving the majority of the latter free to do productive work. As for most of our stockbrokers, general agents, lawyers, bankers, insurance agents, &c., they make no contribution to the resources of society, the number of men in these occupations being far too great for the work to be done.

MORAL EFFECTS OF INDIVIDUALISM.

These are the material influences, but what shall we say of the moral results of the competitive system? It leads to a completely subverted view of all that constitutes good citizenship. In the ancient States of Greece no higher tribute could be paid to a great statesman or general than to say that he was poor. The man who did most for his country and took least from it was the hero then. Times are changed! The great thing now is to take as much from the world as possible, and do as little as you can in return. Work is regarded as contemptible, the most honourable

man being he who can count the largest number of centuries since any of his ancestors did anything to earn his bread. Indeed, anyone who for the common good sacrifices his chance of becoming rich is regarded by many with amused contempt, as a very Quixotic person. The working classes are ready enough to worship the man who feeds upon them, but woe to the man who trys to serve them!

Servility is the chief fruit of the competitive system, for it is the one most in demand. Where the great majority are dependant for their very existence on the wills of others, manliness and individuality must be extremely rare. Personal independance, even in the minutest details of dress and manners, is angrily crushed or derided as eccentricity. Strong and unselfish characters are assailed with malignant ferocity, for nothing is so hateful as virtue in the eyes of cowards and slaves. In the public places they cringe before man, and in their secret chambers they cringe before God. Woe to you, if you will not cringe too!

MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIALISM.

Enough now of the evils of individualism! let us consider how Socialism will remove them. And first, let it be understood that Socialism is not an absolutely definite scheme, complete in every detail. No man can map out with microscopical accuracy the society of the future. Society is not a mechanical structure, but an organic growth, and the man who tries to shape it according to a definite mould is not a philosopher, but a pedant. All that we can say is that we observe several general principles of evolution running through social progress, and that these tend inevitably to something we call Socialism. All that we can do is to assist this process of evolution as much as possible, enlightening the minds and wills of the men who are its instruments, and trying to nullify all counteracting tendencies. Let us observe all these tendencies of evolution and ask whither they are bearing us.

TENDENCIES OF SOCIAL EVOLUTION.

During the last thousand years there has been a marked tendency in social progress to bring the various classes in society more and more to an equality, so that the benefits

of social life may be applied not for the pleasure of a few, but for the welfare of all. We know that "Britons never will be slaves." However that may be, there is no doubt that most of them were slaves at one time, or something very like it. There is much reason to believe that about a thousand years ago chattel slavery in the strictest sense of the word was the lot of a large percentage of our people. The tendency, however, was to soften that down into serfdom, under which the serf must only labour a certain number of days in the week for his lord, retaining the other days for himself. At the time of the Norman Conquest 70 per cent. of the population was in this condition, while the chattel slaves were only 9 per cent. Gradually industrial liberty was increased, the more onerous burdens of serfdom being commuted to a fixed money payment, while slavery disappeared. Still serfdom was not abolished, for the dependant could not leave his holding without his lord's consent. But that restriction, too, disappeared, and what was called free contract took the place of servitude. The same process has been gone through in other countries, only more slowly. In Germany, Austria, and Russia, serfdom lasted into the present century. Having obtained personal freedom, the mass of the people began gradually to strive for political power. For nearly three centuries the struggle for democracy has been going on in England. First the King held the balance of power; then the Lords; then the Commons. But this last term has been constantly growing more expansive. It used to mean a collection of close corporations and privileged individuals. To-day it includes all male householders. To-morrow it will include all adult males. Before long it will include all adults, whether male or female.

But now the curtain is rising to discover the last scene in this great drama of social evolution. Political freedom is only nominal, until it is sealed by economic freedom. What avails it that a man has a vote, if he cannot live without the consent of his fellow-men? So long as a small number of people possess a monopoly of one of the requisites of human life, the majority can never be much more than slaves of this minority. Economic emancipation has become the war-cry of progress. The last great change has already begun. Many of the great industries and public

services are now carried on by the community collectively. The army and navy have long been managed by the state. Now the postal and telegraphic services are under state control. The coinage is issued by the state alone. Gas and water are everywhere becoming municipal affairs. Tramways are being municipalised, and in many countries railways have been nationalised. The cry for land nationalisation is now very loud, and has become an integral part of the advanced Radical programme. In many other ways, too, society is recognising its duty to assist the weak, and use its resources for the common good. Education is now supplied free to all. Here we have public libraries and there public parks. The state is providing better housing for the poor. There is a loud outcry for old age pensions and better poor laws. There is a strong feeling in favour of giving one free meal a day to every school-child. The proposal that the state should fix the hours of labour is fiercely agitated. Nor do the proposers of these socialistic schemes disguise the fact that rent and profits must pay the piper. Ground rents are presently to be taxed, and a heavy graduated income tax will soon be levied. Succession duties will be greatly increased, and the unearned increment will be absorbed by the community. People who shrink from confiscation are beginning to say, Let us tax the landlords and capitalists out. We have been deriding Socialism, and lo! we awake and find we are already far on the way to it. "While philosophers are disputing about the government of the world, hunger and love are performing the task."

THE DECAY OF COMPETITION.

Meanwhile, all things are ripening for the change. Great calamities have befallen that system of competition whose praises our Manchester friends delight to utter, and would delight to sing if economic men were inclined to practise an art so unproductive. Syndicates are being formed to stultify competition, and impose a coercive rule upon all engaged in certain large industries. Rings are formed to fix the prices of goods instead of leaving them to the vicissitudes of the open market. Certain very large pecuniary interests are essentially monopolies. Railways seldom have to face competition, and are able to impose their own terms

on the public, as the public knows too well. Moreover, the personal management of industry by those most interested in it is rapidly dying out. Joint-stock companies, conducted by salaried officials, are supplanting individual enterprise as rapidly as possible. But if industry is to be conducted by salaried managers, they may as well be appointed by the state or municipality as by a number of shareholders. And if we are to have great monopolies in our midst, it is far better to have them under popular control than under the control of irresponsible private companies.

OUTLINES OF SOCIALISED SOCIETY.

Thus it seems that all roads lead to Socialism. What, then, will be the general character of socialised society? As we have said, it is impossible to give precise details, but we may venture to give general characteristics.

1. The land, mines, railways, harbours, factories, and all other means of production and distribution which can only be used collectively, will be owned by the community.
2. These industries will be administered partly by the state, partly by the town, county, and parish councils, and partly by combinations of the workmen engaged in them.
3. Every person will have the opportunity of doing socially useful work, and will receive such a reward as the general interests of society permit.
4. No adult person who is capable of working and yet refuses to do so, will receive anything from society.
5. All persons who, from illness or any other cause, are unable to do work useful to society, will be treated just as well as those who work.
6. All children will receive the best education and nourishment which society can supply.
7. Every human being will be perfectly autonomous so long as he does nothing to cause injury or discomfort to any of his fellow-beings.

OBJECTIONS TO SOCIALISM.

Many of our readers will now confess that a state of things like that above described must be the inevitable outcome of social evolution. But some whose minds are full of the old ideas about Utopian Socialism will still urge objections which seem to them insuperable. We shall consider the most familiar of these.

Objection **A.**—Socialism would take away all incentive to individual effort by preventing the accumulation of fortunes.

Answers.—1st. If such an incentive were needed to make people work, there would be very little industry at the present time. In "Facts for Socialists" we read that "only thirty-nine out of every thousand persons dying leave behind them £300 worth of property (including furniture, etc.), and only sixty-one per thousand leave any property worth mentioning at all." It thus seems that for most men the chances of becoming rich are very slight. At best, a workman may hope for a rise of wages, and differences of reward are quite consistent with Socialism.

2nd. Most men, to whom love of the common good is not a sufficient spur, desire wealth as a path to social distinction. If wealth ceased to lead to distinction, and another pathway opened up, they would follow the latter just as readily. Now, in a Socialist society all useful work and public service will be greatly valued, and ambitious men will therefore have the strongest possible incentive to industry. Moreover, idleness will be far more despised than at present, and few will have the courage to be idle.

3rd. The best work of the world has usually been rewarded with poverty and contempt, seldom with gold and silver. Therefore, men of genius will at least fare better than they have done in the past.

4th. When competition and pressing individual needs disappear, altruism and public spirit will have far greater scope than they have hitherto had.

Objection **B.**—Private initiative is much more efficient than public administration.

Answer.—Private initiative derives what efficiency it has from the personal management of the party most interested. But we have seen that the tendency is for that to disappear, giving way to joint-stock enterprises, controlled by salaried officials. Moreover, free individual enterprise tends to give

way to monopolies, which are often abused by the irresponsible parties who possess them. Thus, individnal enterprise is dying a natural death, and it only remains for the community to step in and avert the dangers of monopolism.

It must also be remembered that the loss of productive power caused by free competition is very great, as we have shown above.

Objection **C.**—In a Socialistic state individuality would be extinguished.

Answer.—Individuality depends chiefly on individual liberty, and we have seen how little of that there can be where most men depend for their very existence on the wills of others. In the words of J. S. Mill, "The restraints of Communism would be freedom in comparison with the present condition of the majority of the human race. The generality of labourers in this and most other countries have as little choice of occupation, or freedom of locomotion, are practically as dependent on fixed rules and on the will of others as they could be on any system short of actual slavery." In a Socialist community the man who does his work, and refrains from injnring his neighbours, will be his own master in every sense.

Objection **D.**—If all were provided with a sufficient subsistence, there would be no restraints on the increase of population, which would go on until all the benefits of Socialism were extinguished by over-population.

Answer.—In the words of Mill, "Communism is precisely the state of things in which opinion might be expected to declare itself with the greatest intensity against this kind of selfish intemperance. Any augmentation of members, which diminished the comfort or increased the toil of the mass, would then cause (which now it does not) immediate and unmistakable inconvenience to every individual in the association; inconvenience which could not then be imputed to the avarice of employers, or the unjust privileges of the rich. In such altered circumstances opinion could not fail to reprobate, and if reprobation did not suffice, to repress by penalties of some description, this or any other culpable self-indulgence at the expense of the community. The Communistic scheme, instead of being peculiarly open to the objection drawn from danger of

over-population, has the recommendation of tending in an especial degree to the prevention of that evil."

Objection **E.**—In a Socialistic society it will be impossible to assign to each his proper occupation. At present this is done by supply and demand, each person entering the occupation in which he finds the best prospects of success, or, if he be an unskilled labourer, taking work where he can get it. But in a Socialistic community, where all are guaranteed their livelihood, it will be difficult to get people to enter in the right proportions into the different branches of industry. Who will do the dirty work?

Answer.—To revolutionary Utopian Socialism this is a very serious objection. The industries which exist are so diverse that if statistics proving their variety were given, the mind could hardly apprehend them, and yet so inter-dependent that the slightest stoppage at any point may paralyse the industrial fabric. Mere goodwill could never organise so complex a structure as the industrial system. Nor could any army of state officials undertake the gigantic task of assigning to individuals their proper places in the framework of society. Only a self-acting economic law could fulfil such a task. But that is no insuperable difficulty. Why should the Law of Supply and Demand not operate in the future as at present? It already regulates all public and municipal industries, and need not be abrogated until a better is discovered. If too many entered the same occupation, the reward of each would be reduced. If too few entered, the reward of each would be increased, until the greater reward induced the necessary number to enter. It is not the wages system, but the starvation wages system, that is hateful. Moreover, the irregularity of employment increases its asperity. But if each man received the full fruits of his labour; if industry were conducted with an amount of publicity equal to the privacy now existing, and every effort were made to spread information regarding the number of workers required in each industry, and the wages paid; if, finally, supplementary industries were established, so that no man could by any chance fail to find work; then we cannot see that any further objection would attach to the wages system. One thing must be remembered. It is useless to speak of social changes unless we have some confidence in the adaptability

of human nature. Every change of circumstances involves a change of habits. During the last half-century every important legislative change has been declared impracticable before it was tried. But the success of most of these changes proves that human natnre has a certain elasticity which always enables it to adapt itself to changes which are not too rapid.

THE SOCIALIST SPIRIT.

But it must never be forgotten that the mere letter of Socialism is nothing without the Socialist spirit. Happily, that is not wanting in Britain to-day. There is less suffering in the world now than there was fifty years ago, but there is far more sympathy. Thc solidarity of society is more and more recognised, and all men are beginning to feel with Matthew Arnold, that, "No individual life can be truly prosperous passed in the midst of those who suffer. To the noble soul it cannot be happy, to the ignoble it cannot be safe." The spirit of Socialism will spread evermore, as the obstacles are removed. Good citizenship cannot be expected from filthy slums, hateful haunts of crime and misery and disease. But the day will come when no man will have to look back upon a childhood embittered by cold and starvation, and soured by kicks and blows. A good father is loved by his children, and a bad father is hated by them, When society learns to be kind to its children, they will love it and call it blessed.

Meanwhile, let each of us remember his share in this great work. Social evolution is sure in its workings, but it works not through the inanimate forces of nature, but through the hearts and brains of men and women. Socialism will come whether we work for it or not, but it will come more quickly the more we work.

> "Let dead hearts tarry and trade and marry,
> And trembling nurse their dreams of mirth,
> While we the living our lives are giving
> To bring the bright new world to birth.
> Come, shoulder to shoulder, ere earth grows older!
> The cause spreads over land and sea;
> Now the world shaketh, and fear awaketh,
> And joy at last for thee and me."

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